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Library without Walls - A Year Later

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Trends

IN LAW LIBRARY MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Edited by Philip C. Berwick ♦ For academic, firm, corporate, and government law librarians

Library Without Walls— A Year Later

By PATRICIA A. CERVENKA, Professor of Law and Director of the Law Library,
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Marquette University Law Library has been without walls since Summer 2010. The new workspace has affected management on three fronts: using cross-trained personnel to staff the circulation desk and work on acquisitions processes, compressing hours for law library services, and maintaining the bulk of the collection in compact shelving.

Personnel

There is no one staff member who “works only in the back.” Every law library staff member and law librarian takes shifts either at the circulation or reference desk so that all work with the public in one way or another. Before moving to the new building we implemented a plan for cross-training all access services and acquisitions/processing personnel so that every position had a back-up and everyone participated in both types of work.

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One of the service points that I thought needed adjusting was the fact that we placed students at the Circulation Desk. Even though many regard student workers as “cheap help,” the fact is that they rarely give the quality of service compared to the full- or part-time staff. We limit student workers to tasks such as shelving, inserting tattletape, and labelling. All circulation desk staff take law review check-in, acquisitions tasks, or other law library projects to work on while at the desk when there is no activity. We have two monitors at the desk so that staff can have both circulation and acquisitions modules running simultaneously.

Another factor in the cross-training decision was that there are fewer packages of print and microfiche materials coming into the law library, so the extra staff time can be used at the desk. All staff members have the opportunity to work with students on a regular basis and be part of the larger law school community.

Law Library Services

In our new building, the Law Library staff is responsible for teaching legal research, reference, circulation and reserve, interlibrary loan and a faculty services program. We do not monitor study rooms which are located throughout the entire law school nor control building hours. The building supervisor group sets building hours, maintains the online study room reservation system, and oversees the Law School Welcome Desk staff who control building access for those without Marquette University IDs.

During the last two years in the old Law School Building, we kept reference, reserve, and circulation statistics for all hours that we held the law library open for study. We determined that after certain hours most law library users did not ask questions, but were seeking a place to study or to use the online and print collection without assistance. We now offer services at the reference desk and circulation desks from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, which is actually an hour less each day of the week than our first year in the new building. Because the law school building is open

approximately the same hours as we maintained in the former Law Library, students, faculty and the public can still come into the building and use the print and online collection even when the Law Library desks are not staffed. The only addition to reference service is the use of an iPad when librarians are in the upper-floor stacks either for additional online searching, or for being notified that someone was waiting for assistance on the first floor.

Knowing the habits of most law library users, we knew that folks would not be too keen on the idea of having to go from the third or fourth floor to the first floor in order to check out a law review volume or a bound copy of the appellate briefs. We decided to place self-checkout stations on each of the second, third, and fourth floors. While that may seem like a large expense, it certainly was a useful alternative rather than having a second circulation desk to service folks on the upper floors. The self-checkout stations give faculty, students, and members of the legal community who hold a Law Library Courtesy Card the ability to check out books during any hour that the Law School Building is open and when we do not staff the library services desks. The exit gate near the Law School Welcome Desk is set to alert folks if they have forgotten to check out library materials before leaving.

Collection

When we first began planning the Law Library in 2005, my opening premise was that the bulk of the collection should be put into compact shelving and that the most-often used materials would be on stationary shelving on the same floor as the reference desk. Once we decided to have reference and circulation desks on the first floor, planning went forward with the locations of materials. Our goal was to maintain a collection level that would be useful to all user types coming to our law library, but also to take up as little space as we needed in order to plan for future digital developments for legal research print materials. We balanced that thinking with the fact that we are the only academic law library in southeastern Wisconsin, and that we bear a responsibility to have a usable collection available

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for the legal community and the public. We never considered the option of having the law library all on one floor, and it was also a building committee premise that group study rooms would be located throughout the law school building.

The reference librarians determined which materials were needed most often by our patrons and placed those materials on the first floor where we intended to have the reference desk. The second most often-used materials, KF I33–9999, were placed in compact shelving on the second floor. We determined that the materials most likely to be completely replaced by digital counterparts, in addition to be in less demand from our walk-in patrons, should be in the compact shelving on the third and fourth floors where the space could be converted to other needs in the future.

One of the wrinkles in the building plan was that the law school loading dock needed to share space with the art museum building next door. The mail room is located in the lower-level loading dock area and requires that the mail come up via the freight elevator to the first floor in the opposite corner of the law library acquisitions and processing staff workspace. We decided that it was a waste of time to bring packaging to the law library acquisitions and processing area, and then take that packaging back to the recycling bins in the loading dock area. Now all our law library staff members share the responsibilities of opening the packages in the mailroom, attaching invoices and packing slips appropriately and disposing of the cardboard right there at the dock. One of the side benefits is that we don't lose invoices.

Conclusion

We enjoy our new library without walls because of the great workspace with windows for every office and our ability to concentrate on our teaching, reference, acquisitions, and circulation work. Our foremost services and responsibilities are enhanced by our integration into the life of the law school.

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